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WIKI WIKI

news

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Competition and Remembrance

Memorial Day 2011



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS • www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov





Being Blinded in Vietnam Doesn't Hold this Marine Down

It was a spectacular view of palm trees and ocean waves from the horseshoe venue at the NVGAG, but unfortunately Junior Farley, a Marine Corps Veteran from Nashville, Tenn., had to have it described to him. Farley lost both eyes in Vietnam when a booby trap exploded covering him with shrapnel.

"This is my first time at the games," said Farley, "but I've already met friends and am truly enjoying myself — even though I'm still kinda learning to play horseshoes. They tap where I'm supposed to throw, but the tap seems farther away than it actually is. I can usually get it in the box though."

Farley not only gets his care from VA, he volunteers at the Nashville VA to help other blinded Veterans use computers. He even works with them in their homes, teaching them how to use programs like JAWS and Zoomtech; programs that allow vision impaired people to use the internet and email.

At the Games, blinded Veterans compete in their own categories. Not only do volunteers tap the stake they are to throw to, they shoot from 20 feet, about half the normal throwing distance.

Farley's wife of 18 years, Donna, was there to cheer Mr. Farley on. Between them they have seven children, 14 grandchildren and three great grandchildren. "I may not have vision, but I have a wonderful family and friends," said Farley. "And I may not win any medals, but I've won friendships," he said with a warm and genuine smile.

"Yep," said Donna, "there can't be any winners if there aren't losers. I think Junior is playing a really important role here — and we are having a wonderful time, too."

The Five Longest Days

As Hawaii was coping with the shock of invasion, U.S. family members were glued to the radio as the words 'Pearl Harbor has been attacked!' echoed through the airwaves. One of those was 10-year-old Edward Gagnon, who watched as his grandfather burst into tears in front of the radio. Gagnon's father was assigned to the Arizona.

The family anxiously waited for five long days to finally learn that his father had not been on the ship and was safe. "My Father loved the Arizona, the loss was brutal on all of us," said Gagnon. "My father helped raise over a million dollars for the Memorial to honor his shipmates." Gagnon himself served in the Air Force during Vietnam.

Gagnon's trip this week to the USS Arizona Memorial was in honor of all his father's buddies who were lost that day. Gagnon commented on the number of Japanese visitors. He truly appreciated their friendliness and the respect they have shown when they visit the Memorial.



Pearl Harbor From the Perspective of Veterans

On a Sunday morning almost 70 years ago, America faced a devastating surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Over 2,400 men were killed and over 1,200 wounded, resulting in America entering World War II. Seventy years later, Veterans attending this year's Golden Age Games were able to visit the Valor in the Pacific National Monument.

"As I walked onto the Memorial, I realized that I was walking on the graves of so many," said JoAn Lance, Air Force Veteran from Chireno, Texas. The reactions to the Memorial have been visible.

"I was 11 years old when the Attack on Pearl Harbor took place," said Glenn Yoakum, an 81-year-old Army Veteran from California. "I remember where I was when the attack happened. Everyone does, that was living at that time. It is no different than today when everyone remembers where they were on September 11th. As a child I remember my parents took me to see the Battleship California that was attacked at Pearl Harbor after it had been raised. This Memorial is a beautiful area and a fitting tribute."

The Memorial brought tears to the eyes of Theodore "Tee" Flack. Having served in the Army during Vietnam, Tee has seen combat.

"Seeing what is left of the Arizona, you can feel the devastation. This attack attracted people to help, and strengthened comradery. The result brings a certain warmth to you."

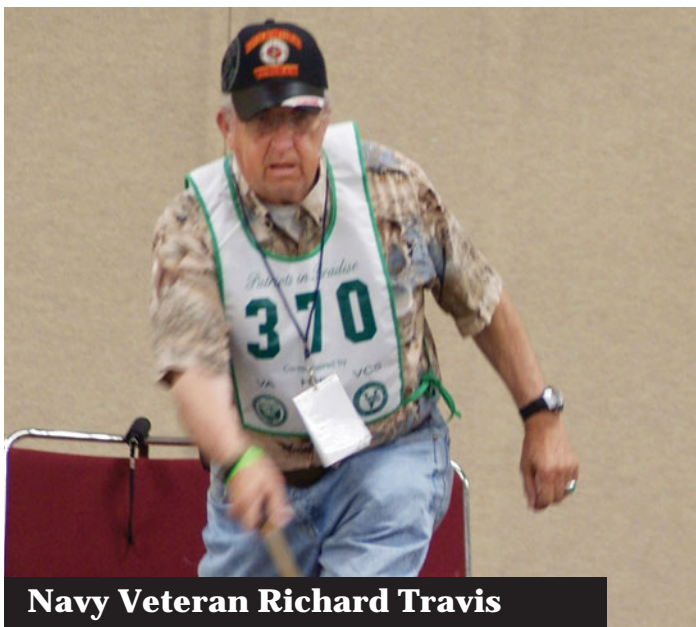
David Shepard, a Marine during the Vietnam conflict, was visibly shaken by the monument. "This is powerful," he said. I have the same feeling here as I did when I saw the Vietnam Memorial for the first time. It's tough!"

Two members of the team from Fresno, Robert Sandoval and Lawrence Anthony Gonzales saw the Memorial together. Both served in the Army in Vietnam, and both were equally affected by what they saw at the monument. "It is very emotional," Sandoval said. "To think about those that perished on the ship, it is very heartbreaking."

For Mr. Gonzales, the Memorial was very awe-inspiring. "This Memorial serves for the men who lost their lives, and a Memorial for all who live." As Mr. Gonzales looked over the side of the Memorial, he saw the oil that is still being released from the wreckage of the Arizona 70 years later. "Sooner or later the oil will run out. But the thoughts for the sailors will always remain. We must never forget that freedom comes with a price."







Navy Veteran Richard Travis



Air Force Veteran David Connery

Reflections of a First-Timer

“This is my first Golden Age Games. I came for fun and camaraderie but also to honor my Dad,” said Richard Travis. Seventy years ago, Travis’ father was in Honolulu serving on the USS Oklahoma as a gunner’s mate. On December 7, 1941, he left the ship to take a call from his wife, who was home in Massachusetts with a seriously ill two-year-old Richard. At that very moment, Japanese bombers hit the Oklahoma and many sailors died. Richard Travis’ dad was injured, too, but in a different way. Throughout his childhood, Richard says his Dad was distant, suffering from “survivor’s guilt.”

Fast forward several decades and that son, Richard Travis, a Marine who served as a jet mechanic from 1957 to 1961, is in Honolulu with his fellow Veterans raving about the Golden Age Games and VA health care. Travis is enrolled at the Loma Linda VAMC where he describes the care as “awesome.”

Recreation therapists and psychologists there have helped him to accept and manage his PTSD. He is doing something he’d never thought he would do in a million years — writing poetry. “It really helps me getting things out that have bothered me for years.”

At the Games, Travis enjoyed participating in Horseshoes, Shuffleboard and Croquet. Perhaps he’ll write a poem about it.

Life-Changing Games

An ever-present smile and a gift of gab have erased any signs of the challenges Air Force Veteran David Connery has overcome. A dissolved marriage, health issues, and displacement from his home by a wildfire took all hope away from Connery. He found himself homeless and sleeping in his car. Wrapped in a state of depression, Connery would go to sleep and ask God to never let him wake up.

But the San Diego VAMC changed that. “I credit the VA and these games for redirecting my life. Lots of Vets still need healing, and I am one of them,” said Connery.

He connected with a number of services, including Pool Therapy. He now has a place of his own thanks to the VA Supportive Housing (VASH) program and doesn’t hesitate to share his story of hope with others. He has lost 20 pounds and 8 inches of his waistline with the help of the VA MOVE program and is committed to continue his path towards a healthier lifestyle.

Things were certainly looking up as he set out for this year’s National Veterans Golden Age Games. “It’s not about competition,” said Connery, it’s about re-engaging in life and setting healthy goals.”



Memorial Day Lantern Floating Ceremony

Candles, with their hauntingly elegant flames, are a symbol used by many cultures to memorialize the deceased. Here in Hawaii, where Eastern and Western civilizations meet, is an extraordinary Memorial Day tradition that is spellbinding in its beauty.

In its 13th year, the Memorial Day Lantern Floating ceremony

will take place at 6:30 p.m. at Ala Moana Beach Park. The ceremony will be led by the spiritual head of the Shinnyo-en Buddhist Order, Her Holiness Keishu Shinso Ito. An expected 40,000 people will attend, some arriving as early as 2 p.m. to stand in line for the best view.

More than 3,000 lanterns will be lit and sent on their silent journey carrying with them personal messages scribbled on the parchment. These messages to departed loved ones honor their memories and help heal the hearts of family and friends.

These personal messages join the pre-printed words the Na Lei Aloha Foundation, sponsor of the event, has printed on each lantern memorializing those who lost their lives during war, those who died as victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on our nation, and those who perished in the Tsunami in Japan. According to Roy Ho, spokesman for the Foundation, the ceremony gives participants and observers healing and hope for the future.

Question of the Day:

What's left on your bucket list?



Irma Pennington
Texas (Army)

I want to get married!



John King
Illinois (Army)

I want to just enjoy the time that I'm here. Just enjoy life!



Jean Patterson
California (Air Force)

I love to travel. I still want to go to Australia and the Caribbean.



Harold Thompson
Tennessee (Army)

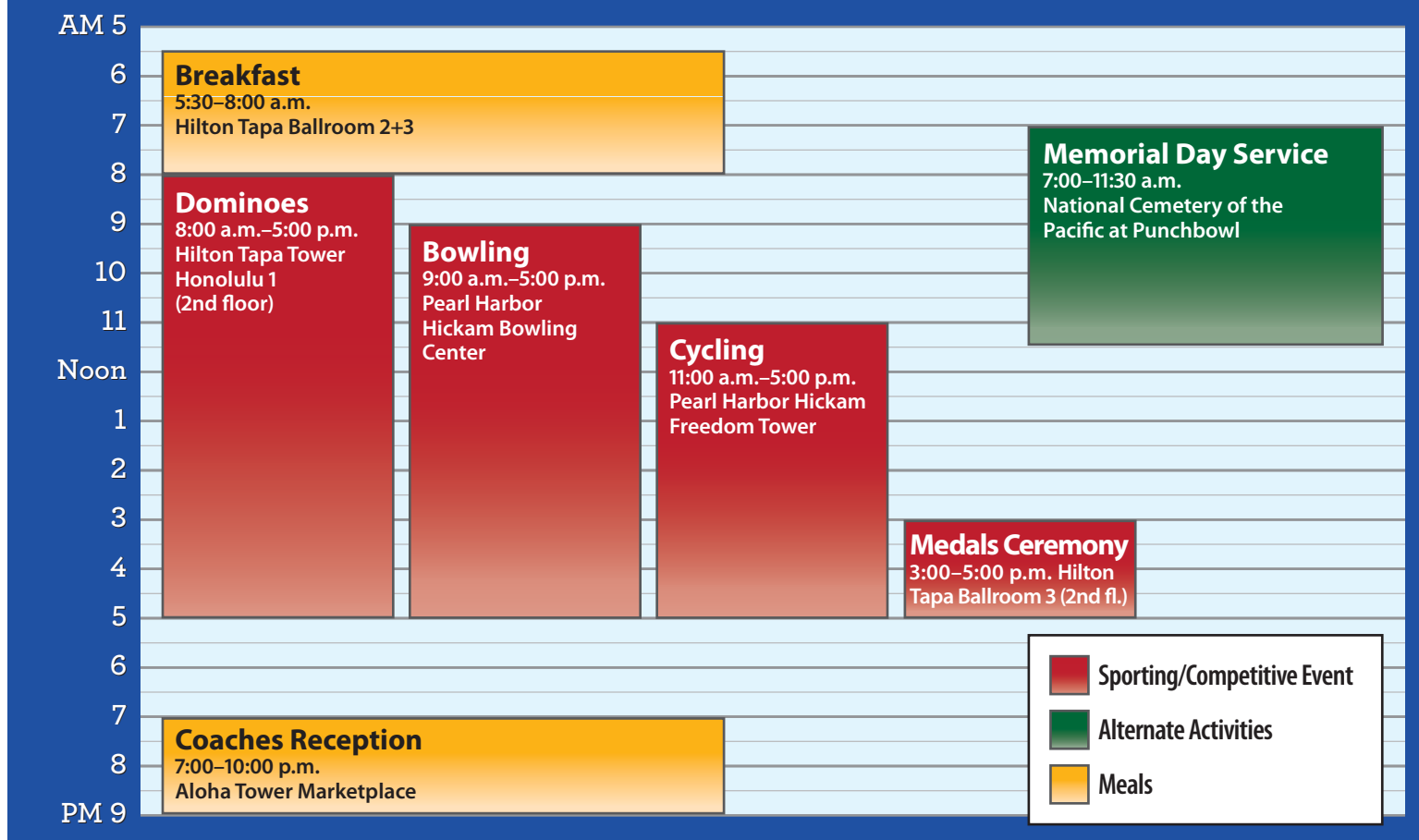
I would love to go to Bethel in New York City.



Debora Rankin
California (Army)

I want to travel to New Zealand and Australia, and to travel to every Golden Age Games that I can.

Schedule for Monday, May 30, 2011



Odds & Ends

Memorial Day Service

A brief memorial service will be held at 7:00 a.m. during breakfast.

NVGAG Medical Suite

Available 24 hours May 28–June 1 at Hilton Tapa Tower, Room 3330. The medical team cannot write new prescriptions for visiting athletes and will not write prescriptions for narcotics and other controlled drugs.

Wheelchair & Prosthetics

Hilton Tapa Tower 2nd floor, Iolani Suites 5–6. Open May 30–31 from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; June 1 from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. From your Hilton hotel room dial 62063.

Golf Participants

If you played Golf on Friday, be sure to pick up your golf towel at Customer Service at Tapa Tower 2nd floor, room Honolulu 2.

Pearl Harbor

No shuttle on Memorial Day. Tuesday shuttle will be available. Only cell phones, cameras and wallets permitted inside. Storage for purses or backpacks available for a fee. Items may not be left on the motor coach.

Late Arrivals

All Veterans who checked in late and did not receive their memorabilia items may come to Customer Service in Tapa Tower 2nd floor, room Honolulu 2 starting Tuesday, May 31 at noon.

For Medaling Athletes

Please be at the Medals Ceremony 45 minutes in advance.

Lost and Found

NVGAG Lost and Found will close at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 31. Remaining items will be transferred to the Hilton registration desk.

Hotel Departures

Departure notices with detailed instructions will be delivered to athlete hotel rooms on Monday, May 30. Please ensure your flight information matches this notice and follow the instructions. Departure times from the hotel are 3 hours before your flight. If there are changes in your travel plans, please contact the staff in Customer Service, Honolulu 2, Tapa Tower.

Shuttle Schedule Changes

Hickam AFB — 6:45 a.m. and every 30 mins. thereafter. Final return shuttle to hotel at 5:00 p.m.

Punchbowl National Cemetery — wheelchair boarding at 6:15 a.m., boarding for all others at 6:30 a.m.

Aloha Towers Coach Reception — boarding at 6:15 p.m. for 6:30 p.m. departure, with continuous shuttles every 30 minutes; final shuttle returns to hotel at 10:00 p.m.